

**Post-colonialism, Ideological Divide and
Emergent Civil Society:
Current Challenges for Ecumenical
Movement in Asia**

後殖民主義，意識形態分歧和

新興公民社會：

當前亞洲基督徒合一運動面臨的挑戰

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[ABSTRACT] In this article I will first review and evaluate briefly the influence and impact of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia during the past 70 years, including her salient achievements (e.g. common witness, social and political engagement) and shortcomings (institutionalized structure, centralization, lack of persuasion among younger generation).

Then I will discuss three aspects of the current challenges for ecumenical movement in Asia: first, the continuing engagement with and handling of the complex colonial past, especially with the development of de-colonizing attempts in South Asia and South-East Asia and post-colonial approaches in East Asia; second, the critical

test of the ideological divide (e.g. Anti-Communism and Cold-War milieu, nationalism and ethnic tensions, globalized market economy and ecological crisis... etc.) which not only hampered the pursuit and witness of ecclesiastical unity but even attested to the fact that ecumenical movement can sometimes result in harsh conflicts and divisions; lastly, in face of the emerging civil society, how is ecumenical movement preparing to react to the rising of civil power and is it possible for the political engagement of the ecumenical movement take the form of making common cause with other civil groups and movements, with the realization that the church is one amongst several social actors and religious bodies?

[摘要]本文先回顧過去 70 年亞洲基督徒合一運動的影響，包括突出的成就（例如共同見證、社會和政治參與）和缺憾（制度化的結構、集中化、對年輕一代缺乏說服力）。

目前亞洲合一運動面臨三方面的挑戰：第一，對複雜的殖民歷史持續鬥爭，尤其是南亞、東南亞去殖民化的發展，和東亞的後殖民方式；第二，意識形態分歧的批判性考驗（如反共和冷戰環境，民族主義和種族緊張關係，全球化市場經濟和生態危機……）這不僅妨礙了對教會團結的追求和見證，而且證明了合一運動有時會導致嚴峻的衝突和分裂；最後，面對新興的民間社會，合一運動怎樣回應民間力量的上升，又，合一運動的政治投入，可以與其他民間團體和運動找到共識嗎，藉此體現教會是不同社會角色和宗教團體的一份子？

New Ecumenical Scenario in the 21st Century:

When commenting on the ecumenical movement in the 21st century, Konrad Raiser, former General Secretary of WCC, contends that its basic shape reflects the "historical predicament" of the

previous era, namely resulting from “the effort of the historic churches in Europe and North America to respond to the impact of social and economic modernization, of colonialism and of the emergence of an international consciousness.”¹ Despite the fact that ecumenical movement has grown and expanded considerably, he argues, the center of gravity of world Christianity as well as the ecumenical movement has moved towards the south and the end of cold war had created a new situation marked by the mounting impact of globalization and the related economic and ecological encroachment of the hegemonic “empire.”²

With the committed and continual foci on Christian unity, on mission and evangelism, and on Christian service and responsibility for justice and peace, the present-day ecumenical movement faced the new realities and challenges of “*koinonia*” or “communion” becoming the new guiding concept to focus the search for unity, of “religious plurality with a tendency of turning into inter-religious conflict,” and of building just and sustainable communities in response to globalization and overcoming the culture of violence.³ As a general proposal Konrad Raiser advocates a move “from an orientation towards institutional ecumenism towards an ecumenism of the people” and the development of “new forms of interaction between global and the local dimensions of human community.”⁴ This resonates with C. S. Song’s notion of reconstructing ecumenism

¹ Konrad Raiser, “The Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century—Challenges and Opportunities,” in *The Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century—Challenges and Opportunities: Collected Essays of the Ecumenical Conference Celebrating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Hong Kong Christian Council* (Hong Kong: HKCC, 2005), 9.

² Raiser, “The Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century,” 10-12.

³ Raiser, “The Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century,” 13-18. Konrad Raiser, *The Challenge of Transformation: An Ecumenical Journey* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2018), 173-200.

⁴ Raiser, “The Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century,” 18-20.

as being of the Spirit, of God's rule, of understanding, and of compassion.⁵

Thus we see in the current ecumenical movement an element of continuity as well as elements of discontinuity and new challenges. This is rightly so in the global context and in Asia. In the following I will discuss three aspects of the current challenges for ecumenical movement in Asia, namely post-colonial critique, ideological divide and the emergent civil society.

The Colonial Past and the Post-Colonial Critique:

Peter C. Phan argues that "One of the bitter ironies of Asian Christianity is that though born in (South-West) Asia, it returned to its birthplace as a foreign religion, or worse, the religion of its colonizers, and is still being widely regarded as such by many Asians."⁶ C. S. Song, in his address at the inauguration of the Program for Theology and Cultures in Asia (PTCA) in 1987, called passionately for a new "theological movement" to "change the ways we (Asian theologians) have been doing theology for many decades, to reclaim our own Asian-ness of our theological tasks, and to be able to carry on our theological responsibility with our fellow Asians."⁷

Indeed, the continuing engagement with and handling of the complex colonial past is of paramount importance. Stephen Neill in

⁵ C. S. Song, "Ecumenism in a Polarized and Polarizing World—Reconstruction in the 21st Century," in *The Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century—Challenges and Opportunities*, 30-48.

⁶ Peter C. Phan, "Introduction: Asian Christianity/Christianities," *Christianities in Asia*, edited by Peter C. Phan (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 2. However, he also argues that such perception "belies the ancient roots of Christianity in Asia." *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁷ C. S. Song, "Freedom of Christian Theology for Asian Cultures – Celebrating the Inauguration of the Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia," in *Asia Journal of Theology*, 3:1 (1989), 87.

his *A History of Christian Missions* named the period between 1858-1914 as “The Heyday of Colonialism”⁸ and pointed to five events which took place at the opening of the period (1858-63) as indicators of the colonial character of the Christian missions: first, the acceptance by the British people of the colonial rule of India by Queen Victoria; second, the ending of war between European powers and China in 1858 with a series of so-called “unequal” treaties which guaranteed toleration of Christianity and protection for missionaries and Chinese Christians; third, the trans-Atlantic Second Evangelical Awakening which triggered the overseas mission movements of the western Christian world; fourth, after an American squadron forcibly anchored in Tokyo Bay under Commodore Matthew C. Perry in 1853, the first western missionary arrived at Japan in 1858; fifth, David Livingstone published his *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* which prompted the passion of mission to Africa.⁹

In fact, during this period, whether viewing from colonial or post-colonial perspectives, we can identify in the missionary movement “a distinctively modern Christian project for ‘enlightening’ the globe by means of a highly organized investment, and transfer from West to East and North to South, of funds, personnel, literature, and institutions” and this prompts historians and anthropologists to depict the missionary movement as “one of the earliest forces of ‘globalization,’ creating networks and new media of communication no less powerful than those established by the global market and information technology revolution of the late twentieth century.”¹⁰ In other words, as David J. Bosch puts it, “the

⁸ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, Revised for the Second Edition by Owen Chadwick (London: Penguin Books, 1987, First Edition, 1964), 273-334.

⁹ Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 274-276.

¹⁰ *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, edited by Brian Stanley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 1.

contemporary crisis of confidence in the validity of Christian mission has its roots in the collapse of the Enlightenment inheritance and the emergence of a postmodern worldview.¹¹

Interestingly, as Brian Stanley points out, "Evangelical Christianity, for long regarded by historians as an enthusiastic, heartwarming, and experiential reaction against the aridity and skepticism of the Age of Reason, has in recent years been increasingly interpreted as a movement whose origins and contours owe an immense debt to the philosophical and cultural patterns of the Enlightenment."¹² As Bosch and other mission scholars had confidently affirmed: "the entire modern missionary enterprise is, to a very real extent, a child of the Enlightenment."¹³

Under such a new *Zeitgeist*, there emerged among the western missionaries two entirely divergent mindset and perspectives towards the local culture. On the one hand, we observe in the European Enlightenment of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries new conceptions of individual freedom, human capacity, communal ethics and social progress. It also enabled the Europeans to acquire new understanding of non-European cultures and religions and be convinced that God had given every human being "an innate moral sense" and that "it was possible to be a virtuous non-Christian or even a virtuous atheist."¹⁴ In short, such conviction allows them to accentuate a universal value system and an open-minded attitude towards other religions and cultures.

¹¹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1991), 2-7, 349-67.

¹² *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, edited by Brian Stanley, 2.

¹³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 274; *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, edited by Brian Stanley, 3-4.

¹⁴ Stewart J. Brown, "The European Enlightenment, Religion and Moral Values," *Theology and The Church*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Tainan: Tainan Theological College and Seminary, 2017), 86-101.

However, during the period between 1790 and 1830, especially with the kindling of religious awakenings, a vibrant, heart-felt form of Christianity emerged as a major force in Europe and North America and there surfaced “an intense Christian faith that emphasized the awesome power of God, human sin, divine judgment, the atonement, the conversion experience, the workings of providence in history and the eternal value of each individual” and, as a consequence, the cosmopolitanism and universalism of the Enlightenment were replaced by “notions of religious nationalism, and of particular nations chosen for special purposes” and “beliefs that some Western nations had a special providential calling to carry the Christian gospel to all peoples, to end slavery and the slave trade across the globe to spread commerce to bring the benefits of Western civilization and to expand empires.”¹⁵ This is a kind of “self-sanctifying” mentality. Here the expansion of the British Empire in the world had formed an intricate and yet intense relationship with the British Protestant overseas missions in Asia.¹⁶

Correspondingly, we discern that the following convictions still existed in the mindset of most of the western missionaries: first, an almost universal belief that non-Western peoples were “heathens,” lost in the degradation of sin and in need of salvation through the gospel of Christ; second, a parallel tendency to dismiss other religious systems either as “heathen idolatry” or as at best superstitions and not religions at all; third, a belief in the manifest superiority and liberating potential of Western “civilization,” in both its intellectual and its technological aspects; fourth, an unshakable confidence in the regenerative capacity of rational knowledge, always provided this was linked to Christian proclamation; fifth, an

¹⁵ Stewart J. Brown, “Christian Awakening in Revolutionary Europe, 1790-1830,” *Theology and The Church*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 119-134.

¹⁶ Stewart J. Brown, “Providential Empire? Early Nineteenth-Century British Overseas Missions in Asia,” *Theology and The Church*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 135-150.

assumption that the Christian message was addressed principally to individuals, calling them to undergo a conscious and identifiable inner experience of personal "conversion" to Christ.¹⁷

Let me take the missionary experiences in Taiwan as an example. When the medical missionaries arrived in Taiwan in late nineteenth century, they discovered that, with the rapid progress of western medicine, especially the breakthrough in the areas of human anatomy and surgical skills, the spread of Christian gospel would be coupled with the introduction of modern medicine and scientific worldview. The medical missionaries such as James Laidlaw Maxwell (1836-1921) were gradually convinced that Christian civilization, in addition to the proclamation of the gospel, would heal physical pains, reduce suffering and promote wellbeing in the human society. It is in part a manifestation and realization of philanthropic spirit.¹⁸ In contrast, non-medical missionaries such as George Leslie Mackay (1844-1901) and Thomas Barclay (1849-1935) were concerned more with the enlightening of the mind, conversations on science and religion, and the development of a "theology of creation" based on arguments from design and evidence.¹⁹ It is indeed an "enlightened mission" which the English and Canadian Presbyterian missionaries had brought to Taiwan.²⁰ However, it is also undeniable that, with the exception of few individual missionaries who had strong respect and identification with the local people and culture, most of the missionaries still carried with them senses of superiority

¹⁷ *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, edited by Brian Stanley, 8.

¹⁸ Maurie Sween, "James Laidlaw Maxwell's Theology of Medical Mission," *Taiwan Journal of Theology*, Vol. 27 (Taipei: Taiwan Theological Seminary, 2005), 207-220.

¹⁹ Yang-en Cheng, "The Influence of the Scottish Enlightenment on Early Taiwan Christianity: The Modernizing Educational Ideas of G. L. Mackay," in *Taiwan Historica*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (2012), 137-164.

²⁰ Douglas Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1971); Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

and paternalism, and a strong prejudice towards the non-western society and culture.

With respect to the Asian context, Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris points to the three common denominators in the Asian reality in the 1980s: overwhelming poverty, a shared history of colonialism and of post-colonial colonialism, and the multifaceted religiousness.²¹ Three decades later, the analysis of Pieris continues to resonate with the nuanced development of the “de-colonizing” attempts in South Asia and South-East Asia and “post-colonial” approaches in East Asia.²²

Ideological Confrontation and its Threat to the Ecumenical Movement:²³

In Asia, the emergent ecumenical movement were often contested or even threatened by ideological confrontations, especially when forcibly drawn into the antagonism between

²¹ Aloysius Pieris, S.J., “Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines,” in *Asia’s Struggle for Full Humanity*, edited by Virginia Fabella (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1980), 75-79. For him, the most salient religio-cultural dimensions of the Asian contexts are the “linguistic heterogeneity” and the “integration of cosmic and metacosmic Asian religiousness” which goes beyond the Western division of philosophy and religion. Aloysius Pieris, S.J., *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988), 69-86.

²² Yang-en Cheng, “What New Song Shall We Sing?”—A Review of the Theory and Practice of Asian Theologies from a Taiwanese Perspective,” in *Contextualizing Christianity in Taiwan*, 322-323. For the theological education in Asia, the “Critical Asian Principle” continues to serve as guideline for the South-East Asia Graduate School of Theology (SEAGST) and the current ATESEA Theological Union (ATU).

²³ A more detailed account of this piece of history can be found in Chen Nan-Jou, *The Social and Political Ethics of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan* (Taipei: Yung-wang, 1999, reprint); *Taiwan A New and Independent Country: Biblical and Theological Reflections on A Declaration on Human Rights of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan*, edited by Lyim Hong-Tiong (Taipei: Faith and Order Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, 2007); Yang-en Cheng, “Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and Democratic Development in Taiwan,” in *Contextualizing Christianity in Taiwan: Collected Writings on the History of Christianity in Taiwan* (Tainan: Jin-Kong, 2005), 221-258.

capitalist and socialist systems or dominant anti-Communist rule under the Cold-War frameworks. What is most saddening is the fact that ecumenical efforts striving for church unity may often result in confrontations or even schisms. In the following I will refer to the vexing experience of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan between 1960s and 1980s as a prominent example.

Right after the Second World War, in the midst of the new social and ecclesiastical context, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) was formally founded, resulting from the remarkable union of the North and South Synods in 1951. Immediately PCT joined the World Presbyterian Alliance and the World Council of Churches and became an active member of the world ecumenical community.²⁴ This young indigenous church, learning to become ecumenical-minded, was deeply influenced and shaped by the principle of "contextualization" coined by Shoki Coe, the Taiwanese theologian, and began her full-fledged ecumenical journey.²⁵ She soon encountered tremendous challenges, including issues of mission and contextualization, ethnic tension and national identity, globalization and economic justice, spiritual renewal and charismatic movements, as well as participating in the process of democratization and political transformation.²⁶

Following the cruel 228 Incident in 1947 and the "white terror" rule in the 1950s,²⁷ Taiwan was forced to serve as the refuge of the

²⁴ MacMillan, *Then Till Now in Formosa* (Taipei: English and Canadian Presbyterian Missions in Formosa, 1953), 93-95.

²⁵ Jonah Chang, *Shoki Coe: An Ecumenical Life in Context* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), pp. 73-134; *Proceedings of the International Conference on Shoki Coe's Spiritual Legacy*, edited by Wang Chaowen (Tainan: Tainan Theological College and Seminary, 2015).

²⁶ Cheng, "What New Song Shall We Sing?"—A Review of the Theory and Practice of Asian Theologies from a Taiwanese Perspective," 301-368.

²⁷ After W. W. II, Taiwan was forced to "return to China" on the basis of the Cairo Declaration (1943). On Oct. 25, 1945 a representative body from the Nationalist regime, headed by Chen Yi, arrived in Taiwan. Even though guilelessly welcomed by

Republic of China (ROC) and the military base for the nationalist regime's illusory policy of the "restoration of China." Kosuke Koyama, the famous Japanese theologian, had the following say about the mentality of the ruling party and its political leaders in Taiwan:

The fundamental policy of the Chiang Kai-shek government since 1949 has been liberation of the mainland. This is more than a national policy and ideology, it is a creed which every person in the island is required to recite liturgically at all occasions. This strange unrealistic creed is the official political 'religion' of the Chiang Kai-shek island.²⁸

As a result, the Nationalist regime (KMT), embracing the anti-Communist ideology and instigated and bolstered by Carl McIntyre of the ICCC, put tremendous pressure on PCT to withdraw from WCC membership. With the tacit understanding of ecumenical leadership, PCT was forced to leave WCC in 1970.²⁹ This tension triggered efforts from western missionaries for democratic development in Taiwan. More than 30 missionaries, many of Reformed affiliations, were politically involved and either deported

Taiwanese people in this initial stage of the take-over, corrupt administration combined with extreme economic inflation, along with the "conqueror" mentality of the Chinese occupation troops led to an autonomous, island-wide uprising on February 28, 1947. What the Taiwanese people naively hoped for were simply peaceful negotiations and ensuing political reforms. Although the demonstration and petition was unarmed and peaceful, one week later approximately 20,000 Taiwanese, mostly intellectuals and elite, were brutally massacred by the Chinese troops sent by Chiang Kai-Shek. On this event and its traumatic impact, see *An Introduction to the 2-28 Tragedy in Taiwan: For World Citizens*, edited by Tsung-yi Lin (Taipei: Taiwan Renaissance Foundation Press, 1998).

²⁸ He adds, "Everyone, including perhaps Chiang Kai-shek himself, knows well of the impossibility of such an enterprise... Yet the nation must propagate the illusion and on the basis of that illusion survive, justify and unify its existence." Kosuke Koyama, *Waterbuffalo Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1974), pp. 17-18. In a sense the "free China" image of Taiwan crafted by the Nationalist regime was gradually challenged by critics as "neither free nor China."

²⁹ Cheng, "Presbyterian Church and Democratic Development in Taiwan," 241-244.

or denied re-entry to Taiwan in late 1960s and 1970s, including Mike Thornberry and Judith Thomas (United Methodist Church, on loan to Taiwan Theological Seminary),³⁰ Daniel Beeby and Boris Anderson (United Reformed Church), Wendell Karsen and Rowland van Es (Reformed Church in America), Donald J. Wilson and David Gelzer (Presbyterian Church USA), just to name a few.³¹

Since 1970s democratic development and the political future of Taiwan became a paramount concern, as well as a divisive issue, for the Taiwanese churches at large. In 1971 the People's Republic of China (PROC) was admitted to the United Nations and the membership of the Republic of China was concluded. Heretofore Taiwan has experienced the most critical phenomena of diplomatic setback and "international isolationism." On the World Human Rights Day of Dec. 10, 1979, the "Kao Hsiong Incident" signaled the dawning of a new era in the history of the Taiwanese democratic movements.³²

During these critical years the PCT issued three public statements entitled: "A Public Statement on Our National Fate" (1971),³³ "Our Appeal" (1975), and "A Declaration of Human

³⁰ Milo L. Thornberry, *Fireproof Moth: A Missionary in Taiwan's White Terror* (Lemoine, PA: Sunbury Press, 2011).

³¹ *Gratitude and Retrospect: Historical Review of International Friends' Struggle for Democracy and Human Rights in Taiwan*, Vols. I & II (Taipei: Foundation for Democracy in Taiwan, 2003); *A Borrowed Voice: Taiwan Human Rights through International Networks, 1960-1980*, written and edited by Linda Gail Arrigo and Lynn Miles (Taipei: Social Empowerment Alliance, 2008).

³² Marc J. Cohen, *Taiwan At the Crossroads: Human Rights, Political Development and Social Change on the Beautiful Island* (Washington, D.C.: Asia Resource Center, 1988), 190-215.

³³ It is interesting to note that this first statement was in fact a joint effort by the then Ecumenical Cooperative Committee of Taiwan (ECCT, the forerunner of NCCT) organized by the mainstream churches in Taiwan. The drafting group consisted of Rev. Chow Lien-hwa (周聯華) of the Baptist Church, Bishop T. Otto Nall (羅愛徒) of the Methodist Church, Bishop Chang Chi-Tang (張齊堂) of the Lutheran Church, and Rev. Dan Beeby (彌迪理) of the Presbyterian Church, with Rev. C. M. Kao (高俊明) of PCT as convener.

Rights” (1977). Through these prophetic statements the PCT called for social and political reforms, proclaimed the right of Taiwanese people to self-determination, and expressed hope for a “new and independent country.”³⁴ In short, the underpinning theological conviction of these statements can be summarized as follows: Jesus Christ is the Lord of history and the entire humankind; human rights are bestowed by God; the identifying of Taiwan as “homeland”; people’s right to political participation and self-determination; the pursuit of a “new and independent country” and the realization of the ideal of God’s Kingdom.³⁵

As a result, the PCT was severely persecuted and suppressed by the Nationalist regime, with Rev. C. M. Kao, the former General Secretary, imprisoned for more than four years. But she did not give in to political pressures. Her concern for the future of Taiwan has remained deeply connected with the renewal of the corporate spirituality of the people, and is an indispensable way of expressing the genuine meaning of Christian faith, namely to restore and affirm the Taiwanese people’s identity and dignity, as an integral part of the salvific mission of God.³⁶

What intrigued us most are the extremely polarized reactions of the ecumenical and the local churches. On the one hand, the three main ecumenical organizations (WCC, WARC, CCA) and more than thirty partner churches all over the world sent representatives or official letters to support PCT,³⁷ whereas other Christian churches in

³⁴ Chen Nan-Jou, *The Social and Political Ethics of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan; Reformed Witness Today: A Collection of Confessions and Statements of Faith Issued by Reformed Churches*, edited by Lukas Vischer (Bern: Evangelische Arbeitsstelle Oekumene Schweiz, 1982), 95-108.

³⁵ Yang-en Cheng, “Presbyterian Church and Democratic Development in Taiwan,” 250-252.

³⁶ See Shoki Coe, *Recollections and Reflections*, edited by Boris Anderson (N.Y.: The Rev. Dr. Shoki Coe’s Memorial Fund, 1993); *Self-Determination: The Case for Taiwan*, edited by C. S. Song (Tainan: Taiwan Church Press, 1988); Chen Nan-Jou, *A Theology of Identifying* (Taipei, Yung-wang, 2003).

³⁷ *The Road of the Cross: The Memoir of Rev. C. M. Kao*, interviewed and

Taiwan, both mainstream denominations and independent churches, did not share these same convictions, and were ready to bring criticisms and charges against the PCT. The grounds for their negative reactions were evidently less theological in nature. Rather, they stemmed largely from ideological and ethnic differences in the Taiwanese context.³⁸ In a recent study Ken Pa Chin also critically analyzed the intermingling of religious faith and anti-Communist ideology among the so-called "party-state Christians" in Taiwan and its impact on the local inter-church relations.³⁹

It is thus worth noting that, since the late-1970s, these two "camps" (PCT and non-PCT) often divided and split in their pro-ecumenical or anti-ecumenical rhetoric. To this day, debates evolving around "whether Christians should engage in social and political actions" or conflicting political ideologies and contrasting attitudes towards the former Nationalist regime and its China-oriented policy, to a certain degree still alienate Christian churches from each other.⁴⁰ Ironically, in 1995, when a delegation from The Presbyterian Church (USA), a long-term partner of PCT, visited Taiwan and held a bilateral conference with NCCT, the leaders from the mainstream churches in Taiwan, including Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist and Catholic churches, were asked about their views on PCT's involvement in the process of democratization of Taiwan during the 1970s and 1980s, all of them

Transcribed by Hu Huei-leng (Taipei: SPwind, 2001), 228-266, 277-288.

³⁸ Yang-en Cheng, "Building a Harmonious Society in Taiwan – An Analysis from the Ideological Perspective," in *Taiwan Journal of Theology*, Vol. 18 (Taipei: Taiwan Theological Seminary, 1996), 121-130.

³⁹ Chin Ken Pa, *Joseph and His Brothers: Apologetic Anti-Communism, Party-State Christians and the Formation of Taiwan Fundamentalists* (Tainan: Taiwan Church Press, 2016). In this captivating study, the fate of PCT, like Joseph being betrayed and sold by his brothers, and that of Rev. Chow Lien-hwa were symbolically linked and revealed in a most poignant way. *Ibid.*, 303-323.

⁴⁰ Yang-en Cheng, "The Ethnic Relations in Taiwan from Religious and Ideological Perspectives," in *History and Faith: A Christian Perspective on Taiwan and the World*, (Tainan: Jin-Kong, 1999), 50-51.

expressed their appreciation and gratitude for the sacrifice and suffering of PCT and some even conveyed their apology and regrets for their silence or acts of condemnation at the time.

Indeed, during the last four decades, PCT continued to bravely embrace ecumenical ethos and joined hands with democratic movement in Taiwan. This struggle and self-understanding is ingeniously reflected in the section on ecclesiology in her *Confession of Faith* issued in 1985: “We believe that the Church is the fellowship of God's people, called to proclaim the salvation of Jesus Christ and to be ambassador of reconciliation. It is both ecumenical and rooted in this land, identifying with all its inhabitants, and through love and suffering becoming the sign of hope.”⁴¹

The Emergence of Civil Society and the Inspiration of Public Theology:

Within the first two decades of the third millennium, the pursuit of civil power and the establishment of a robust civil society has become a compelling reality in Korean, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Malaysia, this will unquestionably pose new challenges for the ecumenical movement in Asia. In face of the emergent civil society, how is ecumenical movement preparing to react to the rising of civil power and is it possible for the political engagement of the ecumenical movement to make common cause with other civil groups and movements, with the realization that the church is one amongst several social actors and religious bodies?

For the last thirty some years, public theology, with impressive pursuits and accounts, has become a new theological movement and

⁴¹ *Reformed Witness Today*, 108.

brings compelling inspiration to the global Christianity. Facing the challenging world situation today, David Ford, in an updated version of David Tracy's three audiences, speaks of theology's "ecology of responsibility": how should theology be true to itself and engage with its audiences of the church, the academy and the public domain?⁴²

Regarding the domains and main issues of public theology, we can roughly render the "public spheres" theory of Jürgen Habermas (namely the so-called four spheres of government, business associations, voluntary associations, and media) or the "sphere sovereignty" theory of Abraham Kuyper as a framework of reference.⁴³ Also, modern scholars also point out the importance of "localization" and the need to engage in cross-fertilizing dialogues between local and global contexts. Currently the prominent studies on local cases can be found in countries such as United Kingdom, United States, Australia, and South Africa.⁴⁴

Clive Pearson, the Aotearoa New Zealand theologian, points us to three directions where public theology can be engaged:⁴⁵

1. The need for a balanced responsibility among the three areas or audiences. In fact, the audience most likely to be

⁴² David Ford, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 18-20; David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 3-46.

⁴³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press, 1989).

⁴⁴ William F. Storrar, "Where the Local and the Global Meet: Duncan Forrester's *Glocal* Public Theology and Scottish Political Context," in *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, edited by William F. Storrar and Andrew R. Morton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2004), 405-30; John de Gruchy, "From Political to Public Theologies: The Role of Theology in Public Life in South Africa," in *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, 45-62; Clive Pearson, "The Quest for a Glocal Public Theology," *International Journal of Public Theology*, 1:2 (2007).

⁴⁵ Clive Pearson, "Questing for the Public Christ," unpublished article, 2008.

ignored by both the academy and the community of faith is “the public.”

2. The capacity to address occasional public issues for the sake of the public or common good for a civil society, or for what both David Ford and Michael Welker call “human flourishing.”⁴⁶

3. The need to draw the “wisdom” and “riches” of the Christian tradition into the public conversation in order to contribute to the well-being of society.” This is a theological function in addition to ethical, pastoral, or missiological ones, each of which has their own public reference.⁴⁷

How should the Asian churches respond to the stimulus and challenge of public theology? The experience of the historical past shows that the ecology or cultural climate of the churches in Asian is habitually alien or resistant to the “public consciousness” that was proposed by the ecumenical movement or social theologies. In fact, the marginalization or privatization of faith among the Asian Christians has become a common phenomenon, resulting in negligence of “structural evils” such as ethnic prejudices, gender inequality, social and economic injustice, falsified historical accounts, and disregard for marginalized or minority groups.

Since the 1990s, there is a pressing call among ecumenical movement for “strengthening civil society as a space for furthering reciprocity, solidarity, dialogue, the capacity for the non-violent resolution of conflicts and reinforcing processes of sharing” and, as a result, the building up and shaping of the space of civil society, both

⁴⁶ Michael Welker, “Who is Jesus Christ For Us Today?” *Harvard Theological Review*, 95.2 (2002), 133.

⁴⁷ Michael J. and Kenneth R. Himes, *The Fullness of Faith: the Public Significance of Theology* (Mahwah, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1993).

locally and globally, has become "the most important 'political' vocation of the ecumenical community."⁴⁸ This is also expressed in the focus on building "just and sustainable communities" as a response to the biblical call to justice, peace, and integrity of creation and reflected in the emphasis on "common citizenship" in inter-religious dialogue as the basis for cooperation between people of different and sometimes conflicting faith traditions.⁴⁹

In fact, the espousal of ecumenical programs or mission projects such as *Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation* (JPIC) has become a shared conviction and inherent ethos in the western world, to a large extent the outcome of the long-term Christian commitment and engagement in the public sphere and larger society.⁵⁰ However, it was evidently not the case in the so-called "third world" or the Global South. As the civil power and public consciousness are presently on the rise in Asia, it is the duty and opportunity for the ecumenical movement to work together with civil groups for the building of a humane community and "the household of God" ("oikoumene").⁵¹

Let me go back to the case of Taiwan. After the lifting of Martial Law and the beginning of the end of dictatorial rule in 1987, the formation of civil society in Taiwan was never truly and well underway. In the midst of political reform and social and economic transformations, politics and economics continued to assume command, with the government and big corporations continually manipulating the power and resources and the so-called "third sector" constantly compressed and pushed to the corner. The NPOs, NGOs, and grass-root and advocacy groups were largely

⁴⁸ Raiser, *The Challenge of Transformation: An Ecumenical Journey*, 206.

⁴⁹ Raiser, *The Challenge of Transformation: An Ecumenical Journey*, 206-207.

⁵⁰ Raiser, *The Challenge of Transformation: An Ecumenical Journey*, 113-124.

⁵¹ Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991).

marginalized and not able to facilitate social change or transformation.⁵² This is most unfortunate since, as Robert Wuthnow convincingly argues, only the faith community that is willing to face and respond positively to the current social issues at hand will be able to exert considerable influence in the existing situation.⁵³

As to the Asian mindset of privatization of faith and the long estrangement of public awareness, Reinhold Niebuhr reminds us: “the roots of religious imagination are much more in the intensities of consciousness and conscience and sense of guilt than they are in all our social experiences.”⁵⁴ Citing Martin Buber, the Jewish philosopher, that “all prophetic faith rests upon the assumption that the God whom I meet in my conscience is the creator of the whole world” and Karl Jaspers, the German philosopher, that “there is a source and end of meaning which transcends all our particular meanings,” Niebuhr argues that Christian faith allows human beings to own a sense of “transcendence”: “Man lives in nature, yet transcends nature, and builds history in his communities, and then he transcends these communities of history and has his own conscience, whereby he can judge the historical situation.”⁵⁵ On the other hand, he also points out that the conscience of our individual religious life will not render us disillusioned with history or society or negligent of our social or historical responsibilities, but rather continue to prompt our sensibility towards society by raising prophetic voices against

⁵² Yang-en Cheng, “The Emergence of Public Theology and Its Relevance to the Taiwanese Context,” *Taiwan Journal of Theology*, Vol. 37 (Taipei: Taiwan Theological Seminary, 2013), 71-98.

⁵³ Robert Wuthnow, *Christianity in the 21st Century: Reflections on the Challenges Ahead* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Burden of Conscience,” in *Justice and Mercy*, edited by Ursula M. Niebuhr (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1974), 110.

⁵⁵ Niebuhr, “The Burden of Conscience,” 106-107.

social injustice, corruption of power, political tyranny, and violation of human rights.⁵⁶

As Konrad Raiser aptly puts it, "During long part of the history of the Christian community religion has been experienced as a factor of division, of conflict and even oppression. The separation between church and state, between religion and politics was meant to transform this situation. The subsequent privatization of religion, its complete removal from the public sphere, has created new problems and can no longer serve as a satisfactory response to the contemporary challenges."⁵⁷ We must hope and trust that, with the assistance of public theology, the ecumenical movement in Asia will be transformed and enriched in a fresh and significant way!

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⁵⁶ Niebuhr, "The Burden of Conscience," 110-111.

⁵⁷ Raiser, "The Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century," 21.

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